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Seceding but not Succeeding

African International Relations and Somaliland's lacking international recognition

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Abstract

Somaliland, the northern region of Somalia, declared independence in 1991 and has for the past two decades functioned as an independent political entity with important state-like structures. However, notwithstanding its relatively high accomplishment (especially as compared to Somalia) in state-building, it remains without any international political recognition. This article attempts to expose the politics behind Somaliland's (non) recognition by analysing key African players and their roles in Somaliland's international recognition game. The main arguments made are that some continental African states and Somaliland's neighbours seem to be content keeping the status quo, and Somaliland's international recognition is not a pressing issue for anyone but Somaliland. The fact that no African country seems to be ready to be the first to recognize Somaliland (while many are happy to be the second) may yet prove the most considerable obstacle for Somaliland's recognition in the foreseeable future.

KEY WORDS:

Somaliland, international recognition, Somalia, Horn of Africa, state secession

Introduction

Since the fall of Siyad Barre (Somalia's long serving dictator president) in 1991, and to a large extent several years before that, Somalia ceased to function as a unified state with centralised political and security authority. While it is still often seen as the archetype of a failed state, Somalia today presents the scholar of international relations with a peculiar example of a highly complex and diverse socio-political landscape, the problems of which are compounded by the inability of international leaders and decision-makers to move away from stereotypical and outdated notions of state inviolability and engage with realities on the ground.

Not all parts of what formally still constitutes the Somali Republic have developed in the same fashion. While much of south and central Somalia descended into civil war in 1991, the north of the country avoided large scale war and devastation by declaring independence as the Republic of Somaliland. In fact, the Republic of Somaliland had previously existed as an independent, sovereign, and internationally recognised state in 1960 before its unification with Somalia. Since 1991, this breakaway state has managed to establish a high degree of security and control over its territory, provide for economic reconstruction of the war-torn country, and hold several democratic elections. However, not withstanding Somaliland's achievements in state-building, the international community has been highly reluctant and very slow to recognize the territory's claims to independence and stabilizing role in the troubled Somali region. In the words of one scholar "the international response to the (re)birth of Somaliland has been marked by an overwhelming lack of interest" (Geldenhuys 2009: 139).

To put it another way, the inability or lack of interest of the international community in dealing with the complex political situation in Somalia is very clearly reflected in the status of Somaliland. While African governments and the African Union (AU), coupled with the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US), and other Western donors have for years funded and provided international recognition to the Transitional Federal Institutions of Somalia, not withstanding their abysmal record of inaptitude, corruption, and lack of popular legitimacy in the country, the same countries and international

organisations still do not recognise the only part of Somalia that actually boasts a legitimate and democratically elected government and has managed to remain largely peaceful since 1991.

In order to understand Somaliland's inability to secure international recognition, it is important to examine the country's relationship with segments of the African community of states.¹ This article therefore discusses the continental and regional players in Somaliland's recognition game, and seeks to analyse their positions on the country's independence. The article firstly outlines a brief history of political developments in Somalia and Somaliland since independence, and then turns to an analysis AU of "heavyweights" such as Egypt and South Africa, both of whom have a pronounced interest in, and close association with Somaliland and Somali issues. Following this, the discussion focuses on Somaliland's immediate neighbourhood and analyzes Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti, and their relationships with the territory. Finally, the discussion culminates with an analysis of the AU's position towards Somaliland and how its lacking policies regarding Somaliland have contributed to the territory's international political isolation.



Map of Somalia. Somaliland is made up of the northern provinces of Awdal, Woqooyi Galbeed, Togdheer, Sanaag, and Sool (the last two are disputed territory between Somaliland and Puntland).

Source: United Nations Cartographic Section 2011.

¹ There is also a word to be said about Somaliland's relationship with segments of the wider international community, especially Western powers such as the UK and US. Although this article is dedicated to exploring the African context of Somaliland's lacking international recognition, it should be noted that one could easily write another article examining the interference of the formerly mentioned countries in Somali affairs, and their adverse effects on the political situation in Somalia/Somaliland.

Somalia and Somaliland: Independence to 1991

During the period of colonialism from roughly the 1880s to World War Two, the lands inhabited by Somali peoples were administered by various non-Somali forces: the French (in what is now Djibouti), the British (in what is now the self-proclaimed state of Somaliland, and Northern Kenya), the Italians (in Somalia proper), and the Ethiopians (in what is still Ethiopia's Ogaden region). As a result of these different foreign administrations and their administrative and governance traditions, the inhabitants of these regions experienced very different colonial legacies.

The British, for example, favored a limited or “thin” involvement in Somaliland and invested meagerly in the local infrastructure with minimal numbers of British settlements, whereas the Italians invested more in Somalia and encouraged Italian settlement and the development of local agriculture (Lewis 2008: 30-31). While this is not the place to offer an exhaustive account of different colonial policies in Somalia, it will suffice to say that different administrative languages coupled with different governing traditions paved the way for severe difficulties for Somalis in bringing the two colonial territories together upon independence.

In July 1960, after some eighty years of European domination and overlordship, the new Republic of Somalia was proclaimed (Meredith 2006: 465). The British protectorate of Somaliland gained independence on 26 June 1960, four days before it joined Italian Somalia on 1 July to form the new Republic (Lewis 2008: 33). This fact is highly important regarding Somaliland's current sovereignty claims and drive for international recognition as it serves to prove Somaliland was once an internationally independent political entity even if for only four days.

Without getting bogged down in lengthy assessments of the period after independence and up to 1991, one can provide a brief overview of the arguably most important political developments. Somalia's first civilian administrations proved to be highly corrupt and unable to deal with the many problems the newly independent nation faced. Some of these problems included the newly unified Republic's legal system—four of

which she inherited (Italian law, British common law, Islamic law-Sharia, and Somali customary law-Xeer) and needed to merge to create an integrated legal code. Also, within the first few years the enthusiasm for the unification waned as northerners began to realise how politically and economically marginalised they were becoming (Bradbury 2008: 33).

In October 1969, after 9 years of civilian government, Somalia's President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated, and a bloodless military coup led by General Mohamed Siyad Barre suspended the constitution leaving him and the army in power. Barre's early years in power were characterized by socialist rule and developing strong ties with the Soviet Union, which allowed Somalia to build up one of Africa's largest standing armies in less than a decade. While the period of Barre's first 7 years in power was relatively peaceful (his regime concentrated mostly on local development and consolidation of authority), what followed would destabilize the country and sow the seeds of discontent amongst Somalis for years to come.

Between 1977 and 1991, Somalia suffered three significant armed conflicts, all of which contributed to the destabilization of the regime, severe economic hardship, and ultimate fragmentation of the Republic. The first conflict, the Ogaden War, was fought against Ethiopia in 1977-1978. In an attempt to realize the dream of the unification of Greater Somalia (unification of all Somali inhabited lands in the Horn of Africa), Barre's forces intervened in support of Somali rebel fighters (Western Somali Liberation Front) to expel Ethiopians from ethnic Somali territory in the region of Ogaden. Unfortunately for Barre, his patrons in the Soviet Union switched sides in the midst of the war, throwing their military weight behind Ethiopia (Lewis 2008: 43-45). Although Barre's forces controlled some ninety percent of the Ogaden in September 1977, by March 1978 they were forced to withdraw almost completely from the region (Clarke and Gosende 2003: 136).

After the defeat in the Ogaden War and during the 1980s Barre developed a strong anti-Soviet stance, which resulted in high levels of aid from the Western world. For example, in the 1980s Italy provided Somalia with \$1 billion in aid, half of it in military supplies, while the US supplied some \$800 million worth of aid, one-quarter in military assistance (Meredith 2006: 468).

By the end of the 1980s, the country was receiving twenty percent of total US aid to Africa (Besteman 1999: 15).

The second significant armed conflict Somalia suffered was between the Somali National Movement (SNM)—made up predominantly of members of the northern-based Issaq clan, and Siyad Barre's regime.² For the better part of the 1980s this was a minor insurgency based mostly in the north and north-west of the country, the area roughly corresponding to today's region of Somaliland. The root causes of the SNM's insurgency lie not only in the general oppressiveness of Barre's regime, especially after the Ogaden War, but also in the increasingly harsh military administration and economic marginalization of the north.

Between 1982 and May 1988 the SNM military campaign remained a small scale revolt, but in 1988 it exploded with dire consequences for Somaliland's population. In response to an SNM offensive, Barre's forces heavily bombarded the regional capital of Hargeisa killing thousands of civilians. In the end, more than 300 000 Issaq refugees fled to Ethiopia, while another half a million fled to other parts of Somalia (Clarke and Gosende 2003: 137). Towards the end of the 1980s the SNM became allied with several other southern based insurgency and liberation movements aimed at overthrowing the Barre regime, and managed to completely "liberate" Somaliland of government forces.

The third significant armed conflict in Somalia prior to 1991 pitted Barre's armed forces against a growing number of clan-based liberation movements in 1989 and 1990, and took place concurrently with the government's war against the SNM. This conflict marked the end of Barre's hold on power, who by the end of 1990 scarcely controlled anything outside the capital and was derisively called "the Mayor of Mogadishu" (Meredith 2006: 469; Clapham 1998: 151). After protracted street fighting and considerable devastation of the capital, the militias and liberation movements managed to expel Barre from Somalia in January 1991. However, Barre's expulsion was not followed by a replacement government, but instead by a long period of violent warfare and looting. As Menkhaus has argued, the Barre regime's "divide-and-rule tactics stoked deep interclan animosities and distrust, and are held partially responsible

2 The SNM was founded in London in 1981 by Issaq expatriates (Bradbury 2008: 61).

for the failure of clans to unite in a post-Barre government" (2006: 80). With the fall of the Siyad Barre regime Somalia closed the curtain on a dark and catastrophic episode of its national history, the repercussions of which are still felt today. Unfortunately what was to follow did little to improve the livelihoods of the majority of the population, and most of the country descended into another stage of civil war which has resulted in the political fragmentation of Somalia still present twenty years later.

Somalia and Somaliland since 1991

The post-Barre war which may have begun as a struggle for control of the government, quickly turned into predatory looting and banditry by various militias. Somalia was also hit by a massive famine in 1992, and in March 1993 the US and UN intervened in the country with a view to helping the famine and war ravaged country. However, after the infamous and highly publicized 1993 "Black Hawk Down" incident in which Somali militias downed two US helicopters and killed 18 soldiers, the US had had enough of Somalia and withdrew its troops from the country in March 1994. Soon after the UN followed suit, leaving the country at the mercy of its own warring parties and clan supported militias (Clarke and Gosende 2003: 143-145).

Since 1995, armed conflict has continued to plague south and central Somalia, but the nature of the conflict has changed. From 1995 to 2006 the majority of armed conflicts in the country occurred locally, pitting subclans against one another, and the duration and intensity of these conflicts was diverse (Menkhaus 2006). In the north-east of the country, regional authorities formed the state of Puntland, which considers itself part of a Federal Somalia. Notwithstanding its problems with piracy, Puntland has developed a semi-autonomous state-like structure which allows it to foster a more secure and peaceful environment than that in central and southern Somalia.

The Transitional Federal Institutions of Somalia and the current government

Although Somalia has been without a functional central government for the past twenty years, there have been international efforts to create one. Between 1993 and 2003, thirteen international conferences on Somalia were held, each with a task of somehow developing or forming a central government (Bradbury 2008: 49). The Djibouti conference on Somalia held in 2000 in the town of Arta did manage to give birth to a Transitional National Government (TNG) of Somalia, but this first “national” government had difficulties gaining even basic support in Mogadishu where it literally controlled only a few streets, and never established any meaningful authority.

In 2004 there was another international conference on Somalia (the Nairobi based Somalia National Reconciliation Conference), and it resulted in the formation of the successor to the previous national government; the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia. Up until August 2012, when its mandate ended, the TFG remained the internationally recognized government of Somalia, and since the September 2012 presidential elections Somalia has been headed by a new president and prime minister, and new (no longer transitional) Federal Government. However, although this new installment of a Federal Government in Mogadishu may be seen as a step in the direction of finally building a permanent Somali government, it is important to note that the new president was not elected by the people (in a popular vote) but by the new Somali parliamentarians, who in turn were also not elected by a popular vote, but by a selected group of elders from Somali clans (BBC 2012c, Al Jazeera 2012). In fact, the very survival of this government, much like that of the TFG before it, is still heavily dependant on international funding and military support.

Sharia courts and Al-Shabaab

From the late 1990s onwards much of south Somalia experienced slight improvements in local systems of governance. In certain areas local polities, generally comprised of Sharia courts sprung up, providing some amount of law and order to the population.³ Sharia courts first emerged in northern Mogadishu in August 1994 and were local, clan based initiatives funded by local Muslim clerics or businessmen, aimed at providing a degree of law, order and security in a stateless environment (Mwangi 2010: 89). The resources of these courts were usually derived from a combination of private contributions and taxation of various business and militia activities.

By late 2005, eleven clan-based Islamic courts were established in Mogadishu alone; some favouring radical Islam, others embodying a more traditional character (Mwangi 2010: 90). These courts formed a loose coalition dubbed the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which in June 2006 defeated the various clan based warlords who had effectively reigned over Mogadishu since the early 1990s, and restored a high degree of peace to the capital; a feat neither the warlords nor the internationally backed TFG were capable of. For the first time since the collapse of the Somali state, an organization managed to unite Mogadishu and deliver relative peace and security to its population. However, the success of the UIC was perceived as a threat by the TFG and Ethiopia, both of whom claimed that the UIC's leadership included Muslim terrorists implicated in bombings in Ethiopia and Kenya, a claim reiterated by the US (Lewis 2008: 88). The rule of the UIC which had, for the first time since the late 1980s, brought relatively centralized political governance to south Somalia was brought to an end by the 2006 US supported Ethiopian invasion.⁴

The Ethiopian invasion seemed a success when UIC troops retreated from direct battle, but the Ethiopians soon became bogged down in intense street-fighting in Mogadishu. Once the Ethiopians withdrew in 2009

3 Sharia courts generally administer Islamic Law (Sharia), and in some instances offer the parties a choice between the application of Sharia or Somali customary law, the Xeer (Menkhaus 2006: 85-86; Johnson and Vriens 2011).

4 In addition to providing logistical and intelligence support, in 2007 the US also actually bombed UIC positions in Somalia (Reynolds 2007).

the TFG quickly lost control of south Somalia. What sprung up from the remnants of the UIC, and is currently in control of parts of southern Somalia is the loosely affiliated Al-Shabaab group. This affiliation of militias and clan-based groups is designated as a terrorist group by the US and other Western governments because of its links to Al-Qaeda (Al Jazeera 2011).⁵

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) military force has been fighting Al-Shabaab for supremacy in south and central Somalia, and remains the main military force backing the current Federal Government of Somalia. The Somali government depends on Ethiopian and AU (including Kenyan) forces to defeat Al-Shabaab, and even though Al-Shabaab has been forced out of Mogadishu, its ultimate defeat is far from imminent.

Developments in Somaliland since 1991

In contrast to events unfolding in the south of Somalia, the northern regions of the country did not suffer such large-scale warfare and devastating plunder and famine. Although the north of Somalia did suffer sporadic clan infighting and severe economic hardship, towards May 1991 a surprising degree of peace between Issaq (the predominant Somali clan in Somaliland) and non-Issaq clans in the region was secured through the mediation of traditional clan elders. At the May 1991 Grand Conference of the Northern Peoples in Burco, Somalilanders declared the region's independence from the south proclaiming the Republic of Somaliland (ICG 2003: 9).

The Republic of Somaliland, roughly the size of England and Wales, faced grave obstacles upon its declaration of independence. Although the main and highly beneficial consequence of its declaration of independence was the avoidance of being dragged into a protracted conflict raging in the south, it had considerable problems of its own. Its territory was devastated by a decade of insurgency and war; it lacked revenues, financial institutions, social services, or direct international support; and half of the population was displaced or living in refugee camps (Bradbury 2008: 77).

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5 Al-Shabaab formally joined Al-Qaeda in 2012 (BBC 2012a).

In order to understand much of the rationale for Somaliland's aspirations towards international recognition, and its view that the country deserves recognition, we need to understand the stark contrast between Somaliland and Somalia in terms of internal state-building developments. The road to peace in Somaliland was paved by many peace and reconciliation conferences and clan elder meetings. Such conferences were concerned with constitutional issues and aimed at agreeing a framework for power sharing amongst Somaliland's clans, creating mechanisms for the participation of clan elders in government, structuring institutions of government, and establishing ways of maintaining security (Bradbury 2008: 96). It was at one such conference, the Conference of Elders of the Communities of Somaliland (also known as the 1993 Borama Conference) that delegates and elders established the three main branches of Somaliland's government: an executive comprised of a president, vice-president, and council ministers; a bicameral parliament composed of elected representatives and a council of elders; and an independent judiciary (Bradbury 2008: 98-99).

While Somaliland did experience a flare up of hostilities and local conflict in late 1994 and early 1995, the government has on the whole managed to provide for a large degree of security. It is the innovative blend of state and non-state actors in local governance that has managed to maintain security in Somaliland and allow the government the focus and intervene only on issues of direct threat to the stability and integrity of the country as a whole (Hagmann and Hoehne 2009: 49). This stands in stark contrast to the situation in most of south and central Somalia, where notwithstanding AMISOM's recent success against Al-Shabaab, security and governance in the past two decades has been very local and community/clan based, and highly fragile.

Somalilanders believe they have earned a right to international recognition because of their significant achievement in governance and democratization.⁶ Somaliland currently boasts most attributes of a democratic state: a constitution that enables a peaceful transition of government (most notably when President Egal died in 2002 and

6 In a 2001 policy document requesting international recognition, the Somaliland Government explained why it did not engage with Somalia representatives in negotiations at the 2000 Arta conference in Djibouti, explicitly stating that Somaliland "could only cooperate with a counterpart who had attained the same level of stability and legality, and who was conducting the affairs of his area through constitutional institutions and a system of justice based on established laws" (Somaliland Government 2001: 43).

the presidency was legally conferred to his vice-president Kahin), and guards civil liberties; a government in which the executive and legislative branches have been controlled by different political parties; active civic organizations; and a relatively free and independent media (Bradbury 2008: 218; Somaliland Times 2002; Hagmann and Hoehne 2009: 52). Independent observers have reported favourably on the election processes in Somaliland in 2005 and 2010 and these elections have served to further institutionalize Somaliland's separation from Somalia and highlight the gap between Somaliland's democratically elected governments and Somalia's non-democratically elected Federal Government (Bradbury 2008: 218; Kibble 2007; Walls and Kibble 2011). Somaliland's government draws its legitimacy from the people, and this is greatly aided by the fact that none of the very limited amounts of aid reaching Somaliland are administered by the government, which has in turn forced Somaliland's political elites to develop relatively accountable and representative institutions (Eubank 2012: 468).

However, it must be noted that the state-building situation in Somaliland is not without issues: there are problems in aligning the goals and objectives of the elected representatives and non-elected elders in the bicameral parliament, issues with recent presidential elections (which include charges of vote rigging and problems with the transfer of power), and disputes with the government of Puntland over the bordering regions of Sool and Sanaag. Nevertheless, for such a young democracy with a very troubled past, Somaliland has set firm foundations for a successful future. Although the country is still faced with international isolation, its example as a stable democracy that has survived for over 20 years, and a bottom-up locally engineered system of governance that highlights the ability of Somali people to govern themselves effectively makes calls for its international recognition ever more pressing.

The Players I: Continental African Heavyweights

Egypt

Egypt's relationship with, and in interest in, Somalia can only be understood vis-à-vis its relationship with Ethiopia. As Jhazbhay states "Egypt has a long historical interest in Somalia and has in the past used Somalia as a pawn to distract Ethiopia" (2007: 246). Egypt's main concern is the Nile River which constitutes the lifeline of the country. With some eighty six percent of the water reaching the Aswan Dam emanating from Ethiopia, the Egyptian leadership wants to maintain "maximum leverage over Ethiopia" (Shinn 2002: 4-5).

Egypt was a staunch supporter of Somali unity and the TFG in Mogadishu; a policy in line with its desires for a strong and unified Somalia which may even one day re-assert its claims over Somali populated areas of Ethiopia, thereby adding to Egypt's leverage (Shinn 2002: 5). Moreover Egypt's enthusiastic support for the interim rulers in Mogadishu has "been matched by its hostility towards Somaliland" (Geldenhuys 2009: 142). Egypt has supported the 2000 Arta process which gave birth to Mogadishu's transitional political entities and strongly opposes an independent Somaliland. An Egyptian envoy visited Somaliland in October 2002 and urged the government to participate in the Kenya sponsored talks on Somali unity. However, such proposals were turned down by Somaliland's president who reminded the Egyptian envoy that his country was one of the first states to recognize Somaliland's independence back in 1960 (Shinn 2002: 5).

Egypt's opposition to Somaliland's independence dates back to the early 1990s, and the days of UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. John Drysdale, a notable UN delegate and scholar of Somaliland, recounted in a 2004 workshop in Somaliland how Boutros-Ghali tried everything in his power to prevent and reverse Somaliland's declaration of independence, even going to the extent of making a bid via the UN to have Egyptian troops deployed in Berbera as part of a "peacekeeping" presence that would have given Egypt a major strategic military foothold in the Horn of

Africa. This was part of an attempt to have a UN resolution passed which, according to Drysdale, would have declared the "territorial integrity" of Somalia, inclusive of Somaliland (quoted in Jhazbhay 2007: 279).

As if to add to the complexities of Somaliland's precarious international position, Egypt's concerns about Somalia have to a large extent expanded into wider Arab League interests in the region (Jhazbhay 2007: 276). The Arab League, of which Somalia is a member, has been a strong supporter of the TFG and Somali unity, and opposes Somaliland's independence. This situation is complex because Gulf States pose a large dilemma for Somaliland. Traditionally Saudi Arabia has been a large importer of Somaliland livestock, but has for the better part of the past fifteen years banned Somaliland livestock imports on the basis of Rift Valley Fever infection (Shinn 2002: 4). While Somaliland does not view the Arab League favourably, mostly due to its support for the TFG, it still needs to plot a non-confrontation course due to its dependency on Saudi demand for the country's livestock.

South Africa

Of the African states not neighbouring Somaliland, South Africa has emerged as the main state "willing to entertain Somaliland's case for international recognition" (Jhazbhay 2007: 284). This view is motivated by several reasons. In April 2003 the Office of the Chief State Law Adviser, Department of Foreign Affairs of South Africa authored a legal brief on "Somaliland's Claim to Sovereign Status". The brief found that "it is undeniable that Somaliland does indeed qualify for statehood, and it is incumbent upon the international community to recognise it" (quoted in Jhazbhay 2007: 258; also see Clapham et. al. 2011: 24). Therefore, since 2003 the South African government has been made aware by its own legal staff that Somaliland qualifies for statehood, and this has influenced the government's stance on understanding, rather than dismissing, Somaliland's recognition aspirations.

Instead of not allowing dissident nationalists any discussion quarter, the South African government since 1994 has traditionally been motivated by "a diplomacy of conflict resolution and reconciliation", and made itself "open to consultations with all parties involved in such intractable

conflicts" (Jhazbhay 2007: 284). South African media have been somewhat impressed by the abilities of Somaliland's leaders in stabilizing the country, especially when contrasted with Somalia, and in the past decade Somaliland has enjoyed an especially close relationship with South Africa (Ibid.: 285; ICG 2006: 14).

Both previous Somaliland presidents Egal and Kahin have made several official visits to South Africa, and the medical treatment of late President Egal in a South African military hospital in Pretoria, where he eventually died, is indicative of a close relationship between the two states. Further indication of this close relationship is the fact that the South African Department of Foreign Affairs would even investigate Somaliland's case for independence in the first place, especially in light of the AU's and most African states' reluctance to engage with secessionist movements which may violate territorial integrity of AU member countries. South Africa may still be unwilling to take the first step in recognising Somaliland, but as a rare state which has fostered a long term engagement with Somaliland, it has encouraged and influenced the AU to send fact finding missions to the country and remains a key ally in the AU (Bradbury 2008: 255).

The Players II: Horn of Africa neighbours

Ethiopia

Ethiopia currently stands as the most strategic (and perhaps most sympathetic) African actor in Somaliland's recognition bid. In the murky world of international relations and political calculations Ethiopia has several concerns in mind when dealing with Somaliland. These issues can broadly be divided into three overlapping categories: Ethiopia's own needs and bilateral relationship with Somaliland, Ethiopia's security calculus vis-à-vis Somalia in general, and Ethiopia's geo-political calculus vis-à-vis Egypt and the Arab League.

During the 1980s, Ethiopia directly and indirectly aided the Somali National Movement in its struggle with the Siyad Barre regime by allowing it sanctuary on Ethiopian territory (Bradbury 2008: 61, 62, 93). Since the fall of Barre, and Somaliland's declaration of independence, Ethiopia has become a close partner to Somaliland, especially as the two countries are closely connected by issues of Somali pastoralist migration, refugees, and the Khat trade.⁷ It has been in the interest of both countries to deal with the refugee and pastoralist grazing rights questions, and this cooperation has brought them both benefits. Also, Ethiopia is Africa's second largest country in terms of population, yet it is a land locked country, and in order to feed its rapid development is in desperate need of sea outlets for purposes of trade and energy security. Somaliland, on the other hand, is in dire need of business for its ports, and its main port of Berbera offers a valuable outlet for Ethiopia's needs.

Ethiopia has signed various bilateral trade agreements with Somaliland, has opened a liaison office in Hargeisa (allowing Somaliland to do the same in Addis Ababa), and is interested in upgrading the road infrastructure linking Ethiopia and the Somaliland port of Berbera where it expects some 20 percent of its trade to flow through (CNN 2000; ICG 2006: 2; Jhazbhay 2003: 79; Jhazbhay 2007: 263). In August 2003 the European Union for the first time shipped food aid to Ethiopia through Berbera. It was reported at the time that some 15 000 tons of aid had arrived in Ethiopia without "a hitch"; according to then President of Somaliland, "a testimony for the credibility and confidence on the security situation" (AFP 2003). The significance of Berbera for Ethiopia is great; the congestion of the Djibouti port is a serious problem, and Ethiopia's troubled relationship with Eritrea means it can never plan long-term use of Eritrean ports. However, the 2012 announcement of the development of a joint South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya Lamu port and oil refinery may in the future threaten Ethiopia's dependence on Somaliland's ports (BBC 2012b).

On the other hand, Ethiopia has also, in 2006, upgraded its representation in Hargeisa at the ambassadorial level (Jhazbhay 2007: 264). This should be seen against the current of regular diplomatic visits by Somaliland officials to Addis Ababa, but also by reciprocal visits of Ethiopian officials

7 Khat (*Catha Edulis*) is a chewable plant which can be considered, depending on whom one asks, a mild stimulant or a serious drug. For the significance of Khat for Somaliland's economy and the extensive links between Khat traders in Ethiopia and Somaliland see Hansen 2010: 594-595.

to Somaliland. This close bilateral and diplomatic relationship is a strong boost for Somaliland's recognition aspirations, especially as Ethiopia is an important AU member and regional power.

Ethiopia's security calculus vis-à-vis Somalia is generally motivated by a concern for Somali irredentism, and regional stability. Its close relationship and unofficial recognition of Somaliland should be seen as an effort in recognising and supporting regional stability, and guarding itself from a resurgence of Somali irredentism (which was the main cause of war between the two countries in 1978-79). Somaliland has emerged from post-Barre Somalia as the most stable and secure political entity, and its stability has allowed the return of many Somali refugees from Ethiopia. By recognising, or fostering hope in future recognition of Somaliland, Ethiopia strengthens the case for a confederative or federal Somali state which may not constitute as big of a threat to Ethiopian interests as a united Somalia could.

Finally, the importance of Ethiopia's geo-political calculus vis-à-vis Egypt and the Arab League needs to be understood in its full context. As Jhazbhay notes

The diverse Somali protagonists, Somaliland included, are essentially proxies in what has been a long and protracted geo-political power-struggle between the Nile Basin powers of 'downstream' Egypt – dependent as it is on the Nile in terms of its security interests – and its Arab League allies, and 'upstream' Ethiopia. The latter's land-locked status and sense of encirclement by Arab-Islamic forces drives its vested interests in the outcome of the Somali question. Hence Ethiopia's vested interest in a federalist resolution of conflict throughout the Somali region, as a safeguard against any future resurgence of Somali irredentism and Egypt's vested interest in a Somali unitary state throughout the entire expanse of the Somali coast, including Somaliland, as a bulwark against Ethiopia and any possibility that Addis Ababa might disrupt Egypt's access to Nile waters (2007: 259-260).

This proxy struggle between Ethiopia and Egypt although difficult to discern at times, is a real and delicate aspect of the Somaliland question. Both countries favour a particular settlement of the Somali question (Ethiopia a confederation or federation, and Egypt a unitary centralised state) and

try and shape political developments in Somalia to suit their own strategic and security interests.

Ethiopia has so far positioned itself well by building considerable influence with the Somali Federal Government (and the previous TFG), while at the same time building strong relations and ties with Somaliland. This allows the Ethiopians to keep a finger on the political pulse of Somalia and always be informed about developments which may go against their interests. However, on the other hand, Ethiopia is also very weary of antagonising Arab League powers and Gulf States, due to its heavy economic interdependence on the Gulf region, and this is one of the reasons why it is unlikely to go it alone in recognising Somaliland (Jhazbhay 2007: 261).

Officially, "Ethiopia is unwilling to be the first to recognize Somaliland. Somalia would immediately attribute nefarious motives to Ethiopian recognition of Somaliland, arguing that it wishes to balkanize Somalia and weaken Somali unity" (Shinn 2002: 4). Unofficially, Ethiopia has raised the issue of extending Somaliland some form of recognition, and appears keen on advocating at least partial recognition for Somaliland. According to a leaked diplomatic cable from the US embassy in Addis Ababa, in a January 2009 meeting with US Air Force Assistant Secretary Phil Carter, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi proposed Somaliland be extended some form of "semi recognition":

... Prime Minister Meles made the case for 'semi-recognition' of Somaliland as a critical step necessary to enhance the international community's ability to support Somaliland on regional security/stability and in its own domestic efforts toward democratization. Meles argued that the international community's status quo relationship with Somaliland is untenable and that Somaliland needs a way around the issue of legal recognition to allow the international community to 'recognize some authority within Somaliland with which it can engage.' ... Meles argued that Somaliland's democratic process cannot be sustained without some kind of interim recognition which can allow for the provision of international assistance to bolster Somaliland's own democratic process. Meles noted that he has already broached the notion of an interim- or semi-recognition, along the lines of what the Palestinian Authority enjoys, with Somaliland President Kahin Riyale,

and that Riyale has become increasingly receptive to the strategy. Meles argued to Carter that the next steps must be for others in the international community to help convince the Somalilanders of such an approach. Then, Somaliland needs a 'good sponsor' within the African community to advance the cause. Meles suggested that Djibouti would be the best choice, and acknowledged that Ethiopia would be the worst (as the move risked only fuelling detractors' arguments that Ethiopia is bent on breaking up Somalia). Once the strategy had support among African states, Meles argued that the onus would be on the U.S. and UK to make the Somaliland semi-recognition case to the Europeans and others in the international community (United States 2009a).

As noted in the cable, Ethiopia sees itself as the worst choice of a first country to extend Somaliland some form of de jure recognition and this was already stated by Zenawi in 2006 at a roundtable discussion at the University of South Africa. As Zenawi stated back then, because of Ethiopia's "historical baggage" on Somali issues, other countries could be more adventurous than Ethiopia in recognising Somaliland, but Ethiopia would, behind the scenes "support justice and self-determination of Somaliland" (quoted in Jhazbhay 2007: 265).

Djibouti and Kenya

Somalia's last two neighbours, Djibouti and Kenya, both have a strong interest in Somali affairs, and have at some point in time played important roles in attempting to bring about/influence a political settlement in the country. As it currently stands, both countries are also officially committed to a unified Somalia, however, with varying degrees of support for Somaliland.

The former French Somali protectorate, Djibouti, is Somaliland's north-western neighbour and some sixty percent of its population is Somali. Relations between the two countries have varied, and remain somewhat "correct but not warm"; largely due to Djibouti's hosting of the 2000 Arta conference, and its support for the TFG (Shinn 2002: 4). Djibouti was considered one of the principal backers of the TNG in the international arena before it collapsed, and during its organisation of the Arta

conference relations with Somaliland froze (Geldenhuis 2009: 142). However, the collapse of the TNG and the triggering of the 14th attempt at reconstituting Somalia

Placed Djibouti and its Arab-backers on the defensive vis-à-vis Ethiopia's backing for the federal 'solution', which emerged as the successor to the TNG... The terminal disintegration of Arta and its TNG progeny inexorably played into the hands of Ethiopia and its Somali regional coalition allies. These dynamics worked to eventually depolarize the tense relations between Djibouti and Somaliland, although the distrust that the Arta process had generated appeared to linger...(Jhazbhay 2007: 268).

Relations between the two countries did begin to thaw, and in a 2005 trip to Djibouti Somaliland's President was reportedly accorded an official welcome at Djibouti airport before proceeding to meet the Djibouti president at his palace. This reception "included all ceremonial symbols of an official visit by a foreign Head of State", and was seen as an important symbolic victory to President Kahin as Djibouti was long regarded as "one of the principal opponents to the recognition of Somaliland" (Afrol News 2005). Furthermore, while still officially committed to the TFG and a unified Somalia, Djibouti has permitted Somaliland to open liaison offices in the country and engage in a range of bilateral ties, and this has given rise to the view that Djibouti is "slowly beginning to incline towards support of Somaliland's recognition" (Jhazbhay 2007: 271; ICG 2006: 14).

However, such views may be premature. While in December 2008 Somaliland's President Kahin was again greeted with a high-level welcoming party of Djibouti officials, and spent some four hours in discussion with Djibouti's president, this did not bring his country closer to recognition by Djibouti (Somaliland Times 2008). Confidential US embassy cables reveal that a month after the visit, Djibouti's Foreign Minister Youssouf clarified to the US ambassador in Djibouti that Djibouti's policy towards Somalia continued to be guided by three principles: staunch adherence to a "one-Somalia policy" (the Foreign Minister actually stated that it would take a "major shock" to cause Djibouti to revisit this position); reluctance to be the first state to recognize an independent Somaliland (a position they already conveyed to Somaliland officials); and willingness to engage with Somaliland on a "de facto" basis in view of close trade,

cultural, and demographic connections (United States 2009a: point 3). Therefore, while Djibouti may be inclined to widen diplomatic links with Somaliland on an unofficial basis, it is still officially dedicated to a unified Somalia, and not interested in extending Somaliland formal recognition.

Kenya has a significant Somali population in its Northern District bordering Somalia, and was embroiled in a secessionist conflict with its Somali population in the mid 1960s. The country is also connected with Somalia through extensive economic and business links via its Somali Diaspora (especially in the Eastleigh district of Nairobi). Also, the string of high profile abductions and attacks conducted by alleged Somali militias along Kenya's touristic coast in 2011 has brought considerable domestic attention to Somali affairs. Kenya's late 2011 military incursion into south Somalia has directly involved the country in Somali political developments, where it currently supports the Mogadishu based Federal Government and has joined forces with AU troops under the AMISOM banner (AMISOM 2012).

Kenya has in the past facilitated Somali peace talks, and through its main facilitator, Special Envoy on behalf of East Africa's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), stated that it did not recognize Somaliland. Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat, during the 2003 negotiations, made it clear that IGAD would pressure for a united Somalia, and that it did not recognize Somaliland (Jhazbhay 2007: 273). Although such views, coupled with Kenyan military activity supporting first the TFG and now the Federal Government in Mogadishu suggest a strong preference for a unitary solution to the Somali question, there is evidence that Kenya, similarly to Ethiopia, may favour a regionalised Somalia.

While Kenya is involved militarily in Somalia under the AMISOM banner fighting on behalf of the Somali Federal Government, that does not mean that it favours a strong centralised Somali state. Kenya's strategy for a while now has been to carve up a semi-autonomous state to act as a buffer zone within the country, which would be controlled by a friendly Somali faction. The buffer zone region, also known as Jubaland, would be used to keep Somalia's Islamists out of Kenya (GlobalPost 2011; The Platform 2011). U.S. Embassy cables from 2009 confirm that Somali elders, TFG officials, and Kenyan government officials had actually debated and planned the Jubaland project in Nairobi, and even Ethiopia's Prime

Minister Meles Zenawi expressed principle support for the project (United States 2009b,c,d). In fact, according to recent reports it would seem that Kenya's preferred Jubaland outcome has already taken place, with a semi-autonomous Jubaland state already been declared by local south Somali militias (News 24 2013; Standard Digital News 2013).

It is quite possible that Kenya, much like Ethiopia, is not too keen on a united Somalia with a strong central government, and what the two countries have in common is "the necessity to maintain a stable stalemate between Somaliland and Somalia" (Jhazbhay 2007: 275). However, officially none of Somaliland's immediate neighbours contemplate extending recognition, at least until military activities and political initiatives in Somalia do not yield a more peaceful and secure environment.

The Principal Player: The African Union

Finally, the analysis of key players in Somaliland's international recognition game reaches its arguably most important actor. Most of Somaliland's neighbours are quite happy to leave Somaliland's question to be decided by the AU (knowing very well that this may sustain the status quo for a while). International donors fall in line here as well, as most of them are either not interested enough in Somaliland, or simply do not wish to be perceived as meddling in African affairs. As any recognition of Somaliland by a non-African country would be seen as neo-colonialism or unwelcome interference in African affairs, this view is understandable, especially regarding ex-colonial powers such as the UK.

So far, the AU has failed to deal constructively with the Somaliland question, and shoulders much of the blame for the country's international isolation. If one had to use a single phrase to characterise the AU's position towards Somaliland, it would be "bi-polar". The mixed signals the AU has been sending Somaliland leaders in the past ten years are indicative of its bi-polar personality. The AU recognises Somalia as a full member and awarded the TFG's representative a chair at its Assembly (now inherited

by a Federal Government official), while at the same time snubbing Somaliland's statehood aspirations. Yet the AU's own officials concluded that Somaliland's case for independence has merit and should be seriously considered. As Geldenhuys concludes, the "AU has so far failed to rise to the challenge, preferring a Somaliland left in international limbo to an organization torn by such an emotive issue. Yet the AU was the very institution to which the international community turned for guidance on the future of Somaliland" (2009: 140).

While the EU, amid the bloodshed of Yugoslavia's dissolution moved quickly to establish a set of policies governing the recognition of new states in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, the AU still lacks, in the words of one official "a common policy on issues of 'second-generation' independence"(quoted in ICG 2006: 14). Because of this lack of common policy, coupled with an unwillingness to create innovative ways of dealing with territorial integrity and state secession, the AU has repeatedly failed to come to terms with events on the ground in Somalia. As Bradbury concludes, the AU's strategy in the Kenyan sponsored peace talks "was to 'park' the issue of Somaliland, in order to protect the stability in that region. The message from Somaliland, as always, is that it won't wait, that it pulled out of the car park some time ago. It is steering its own course, and hopes that the international community will follow this" (quoted in Jhazbhay 2007: 250).

As early as 2002, Somaliland invited the AU to send a fact finding mission to the country (ICG 2006: 2). Its diplomats paid successive visits to the AU in 2003, 2004, and early 2005, and on that last visit Somaliland's President Kahin sought observer status to be awarded to his country so it could better follow events on the continent and have a permanent representation at the Union. It took the AU a few years, but a fact finding mission was in the end dispatched in April 2005, and was headed by then Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Patrick Mazimhaka. The mission's report acknowledged the peace and stability achieved in Somaliland, and was generally supportive of Somaliland's independence claims. It stated that "the fact that the 'union between Somaliland and Somalia was never ratified' and also malfunctioned when it went into action from 1960 to 1990, makes Somaliland's search for recognition historically unique and self-justified in African political history". The mission

further recommended that Somaliland's case "should not be linked to the notion of 'opening a Pandora's box'". As such, the AU should find a special method of dealing with this outstanding case, and noted that "the lack of recognition ties the hands of the authorities and people of Somaliland as they cannot effectively and sustainably transact with the outside to pursue the reconstruction and development goals... the AU should be disposed to judge the case of Somaliland from an objective historical viewpoint and a moral angle vis-à-vis the aspirations of the people" (African Union 2005).

The observations of the AU's 2005 fact finding mission to Somaliland were generally positive, and left the Union with a clear recommendation: judge Somaliland's case on its own merits, and don't use the notion of "opening a Pandora's box" as an alibi for not dealing with this issue. However, Somaliland's bid for observer status to the AU was unsuccessful, and the AU never actually gave Somaliland any feedback following its 2005 fact finding mission (Clapham et. al. 2011: 11). In fact, Somaliland's future status was discussed by AU foreign ministers in 2006, and Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia contributed to the debate and discussion by stating "that the Somaliland peace and stability has to be acknowledged and recognized, and that the African Union has to find a way to reward and consolidate its stability and its emerging democracy" (Voice Of America 2006). Furthermore, at an AU Executive Council Meeting in Addis Ababa in January 2007, the then Chairman of the Executive Council from the Republic of Congo concluded that

...there is a reality in Somaliland that cannot be ignored. We cannot afford to close our eyes or shy away from that reality. It is in the interest of Africa to pay attention to these issues. There were positive developments in Somaliland, including the restoration of stability and peace, the establishment of democratic institutions and processes and the efforts deployed internally towards reconstruction. Some of these achievements in Somaliland should inspire the rest of Somalia. This is an issue that is now known to the African Union policy organs and it should be discussed at an appropriate time (quoted in Somaliland Times 2007).

Later in the same year, Alpha Konare, Chairman of the AU Commission, told the body's Executive Council that the African continent had to deal

with the reality of Somaliland's existence and to engage with its unsettled international legal status (Ibid.). Unfortunately, since then nothing new has happened and the issue of Somaliland at the 2008 AU summit in Accra was relegated to "any other business" on the agenda (Clapham et.al. 2011: 11). The only relatively positive development (for Somaliland) since then took place in 2010, when the Peace and Security Council of the AU directed the Commission's Chairperson to "broaden consultations with Somaliland and Puntland as part of the overall efforts to promote stability and further peace and reconciliation in Somalia" (quoted in Clapham et. al. 2011: 11). However, what this actually means for Somaliland's independence is unclear and hardly constitutes a new strategy of engagement with the country.

So far, it would seem that there are elements at the AU level which do favour a resolution of the Somaliland question. As one senior AU official noted back in 2006, "For fifteen years Somaliland has been told to wait until a stable government is established in the South. They should not have to wait any longer....Somaliland has a right to have its case heard, and as African leaders we have a duty to listen to what they have to say" (quoted in ICG 2006: 3). However, the AU's stubborn unwillingness or inability to deal with this issue leads us right back to the bi-polarity of its dealings with Somaliland. For, although the sporadic rhetoric coming from some AU officials might favour dealing with Somaliland and possibly extending its some form of recognition, the wider policies of the organisation actually work in a different direction.

The AU has in the past decade developed an integrationist trajectory for African inter-state relations. What currently tops the AU agenda is political and economic development and regional integration. This means that, as Jhazbhay states, "within this context of continental 'African unity', all outstanding African self-determination questions will have to be re-thought and re-conceptualised in terms of how they contribute to or detract from African integration, and reinforce or overcome Africa's already debilitating fragmentation" (2007: 252). This is one of the reasons why, for example, Ethiopia is unwilling to initiate any major diplomatic moves towards recognising Somaliland as the regional integration in East and North-East Africa is still in the air in terms of how it will be economically and politically configured. So the AU's drive towards greater regional

integration works directly against Somaliland's secession, because Somaliland's case directly challenges the AU's integrationist discourse.

While the AU does maintain contacts with the Somaliland government, its "continental internationalist agenda, linked to the evolution of 'regional integration communities' among its sub-regions, is likely to rule out AU official recognition of Somaliland no matter what the legal and political case for such decisions might be" (Jhazbhay 2007: 288). Somaliland's future recognition, therefore, is unlikely to come from the AU if it devotes itself blindly to its integrationist ideology. However, with the recent push by foreign donors for anti-piracy activities in Somalia, and their growing recognition of Somaliland's importance for regional stability and battling piracy, the AU may be pressured or disposed to develop a somewhat different approach to Somaliland. The AU may be slow to react, but it is not completely blind to developments on the ground, and Somaliland's potential role in stabilizing the Somali coast could eventually win it more support in the Union. The main problem for the AU, and worst case scenario, could be a situation where member states decide to break away with its ineffective Somalia policies and individually recognise Somaliland. This could have profound consequences for the organisation's stability and credibility, and create considerable tensions within the Union itself.

To sum up, we should examine Somaliland's prospects for recognition by the AU. As it currently stands the AU troops in Somalia are in effect the "army" of the Mogadishu based Federal Government, and in that regard, the AU is in fact a warring party heavily supporting a unified Somalia. Therefore, currently the AU is not interested in recognising Somaliland. Even a limited concession such as awarding Somaliland observer status at the AU is too innovative for the organization to entertain. For Somaliland to be taken seriously by the AU "it must persuade the organisation that its request is justifiable under international law, serves the greater interest of the AU as a whole (or at least of enough individual member states to swing a vote) and would contribute to the stability and development of the region" (ICG 2006: 10). Somaliland is already treading along that path, and key AU states such as Ethiopia and South Africa might consider assessing Somaliland's recognition case "in terms of how this could either contribute to or detract from advancing the stability of the Somali coast and, based on such an assessment, whether or not Ethiopia and South

Africa, together with the AU, could fashion a diplomacy of reconciling Somaliland and Somalia accordingly" (Jhazbhay 2007: 303). However, such developments depend on many factors completely outside of Somaliland's control, and this examination of the AU's stance towards Somaliland is a good indication of the complexities and obstacles Somaliland faces in achieving international recognition.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article has been to analyse the roles of key players in Somaliland's recognition game, and examine their positions on the territory's independence. The article has attempted to explain why Somaliland's international recognition is still lacking by trying to shed a light on the often murky world of African international relations, especially the relations between key African states and Somalia/Somaliland.

Somaliland's relationship with African states in the neighbourhood and beyond is complex. South Africa remains the most willing non-neighbour state to entertain recognition of Somaliland. Although it too officially does not recognise Somaliland (Times Live 2011), the two states have cultivated a close diplomatic relationship: South Africa has sent three election observer teams to Somaliland elections, and Somaliland presidents have travelled to the country on several occasions. Furthermore, South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs legal adviser actually investigated Somaliland's claims to statehood, reporting favourably that the territory was indeed entitled to international recognition. South Africa remains one of the few states, in addition to Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia, which recognise Somaliland travel documents (Clapham et.al. 2011: 22).

Ethiopia and Egypt are locked in a strategic diplomatic proxy war over Somalia's fate, and this is evidenced by their respective positions on Somaliland. Egypt does not recognise Somaliland, and was one of the main backers of the TFG, either bilaterally or through the Arab League. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is happy to officially maintain the status quo

of not recognising Somaliland, while behind the scenes working very closely with Somalilanders on forging close trade and diplomatic ties. Ethiopia remains the most favourably disposed African country towards Somaliland's recognition, and has a long history of good relations with Somaliland's leadership. While Ethiopia is unlikely to recognise Somaliland without AU support, it is also a key player in the AU, and can use its influence to Somaliland's advantage. However, because of its "historical baggage" with Somalia, it is very reluctant to be the first country to recognise Somaliland.

For the time being Somaliland's neighbors (Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia) are quite happy keeping the status quo as it allows them to manipulate the political leadership in Somalia (which was either put in place by their diplomacy or is currently kept in place by their military) while at the same time staying in good relations with Somaliland. Regional strategic interests of Somaliland's neighbors trump Somaliland's recognition aspirations and until these two factors are aligned more closely the situation regarding Somaliland's recognition is not likely to change.

None of the above discussed African countries are willing to act on Somaliland's recognition without the AU's sanctioning first. This makes the AU the principal player in Somaliland's recognition game. The AU is currently not interested in Somaliland's recognition, and while its troops are heavily involved in supporting the Federal Government in Mogadishu, it is unlikely that this situation will change anytime soon. The AU's record of sending mixed signals to Somaliland is a reflection of the lack of unity within the organisation on how best to proceed in dealing with Somalia, and is also indicative of a lack of idea on how to reconcile its policy of regional integration with the realities on the ground in Somalia which may not favour such discourses. In the end, it would appear that Somaliland's international recognition is not a pressing issue for anyone but Somaliland, and this may be the main reason why its international recognition is still lacking. Also, the fact that no African country seems to be ready to be the first to recognize Somaliland (while many are happy to be the second) may yet prove the most considerable obstacle for Somaliland's recognition in the foreseeable future.

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